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SECTION: NEWS**LENGTH:** 751 words**HEADLINE:** Judge Anselm Sodaro, 91; renowned for civility**BYLINE:** Joe Surkiewicz**BODY:**

Chief **Judge Anselm Sodaro**, a jurist renowned for his courtroom civility and remembered as a Baltimore state's attorney who successfully prosecuted one of Maryland's most notorious murderers, died Sunday of cancer.

Sodaro, who was 91, retired from the Supreme Bench of Baltimore (now the circuit court) in 1980. He served as Baltimore City State's Attorney from 1950 to 1956, when he was appointed to the bench.

The son of a village shoemaker in Sicily, the 6-year-old **Sodaro** arrived at Ellis Island in 1916 and went on to become "one of the great leaders of the bench in Baltimore," Chief **Judge** Robert M. Bell of the Court of Appeals said yesterday.

"He was held in high esteem by my predecessors for his leadership in tough times," Bell said. "It was under **Sodaro's** watch that affirmative action was implemented."

Bell recalled going to the movies in Baltimore and watching **Sodaro's** political campaign advertisements in theaters when he ran for state's attorney in 1950 and 1954.

"I sat in front and remember looking up at him and thinking how tall he was," Bell said. "When I met him, I found out how short he was. But he was a giant of a man."

Court of Special Appeals Chief **Judge** Joseph F. Murphy Jr. called **Sodaro** "a beloved person and **judge**."

"All the lawyers wanted to be in his courtroom," added Murphy, whose law clerk is **Sodaro's** grandson, Matthew **Anselm Sodaro** Esworthy. "When I was in the city's state's attorney's office, he was one of the stars of the bench. I had the good fortune to try many cases before him. He was a wonderful, even-tempered person."

George L. Russell Jr., who served on the bench with **Sodaro** from 1966 to 1968, said **Sodaro's** death "leaves a void."

"He tapped on the bench with a fountain pen, not a gavel, to get someone's attention," recalled Russell, the first black **judge** to serve on a jury trial court in Maryland. "He was a wonderful **judge** and a wonderful person with a deep sense of humor. We're going to miss him."

U.S. District Court **Judge** J. Frederick Motz called **Sodaro** "a real gentleman."

"When I practiced law, it was a tremendous pleasure to appear before him," Motz recalled. "You knew you would get a fair hearing."

To retired Court of Special Appeals **Judge** Charles C. Moylan Jr., **Sodaro** was "a real giant."

"My dominant memory of him is as 'Mr. State's Attorney,'" said Moylan, a long-time friend. "He was the embodiment of what a state's attorney should be."

Sodaro was educated in Baltimore City schools, graduated from Loyola College in 1931 and earned a J.D. from the University of Maryland School of Law in 1934. He was appointed an assistant state's attorney in 1938 and was elected state's attorney in 1950 and 1954.

High-profile cases he successfully tried included the 1952 murder prosecution of G. Edward Grammer for killing

his wife — a crime dubbed the "near-perfect murder." **Sodaro** used innovative forensic pathology to build a strong circumstantial case that it was Grammer who bludgeoned his wife, put her body in a car and sent the automobile down a hill with a rock jamming the accelerator.

Grammer's botched execution by hanging — the hangman failed to place the rope correctly and his death took 20 minutes — resulted in the use of the electric chair for later executions.

In 1956, Gov. Theodore R. McKeldin appointed **Sodaro** to the Supreme Bench, and he was later elected to two 15-year terms. He was named chief **judge** in 1976.

Sodaro's reputation for courtroom civility led to the Maryland State Bar Association establishing the annual **Judge Anselm Sodaro** Judicial Civility Award in 1998.

Last year, **Sodaro** was awarded the Robert C. Heeney Memorial Award by the MSBA Section of Criminal Law and Practice. The award is given each year to the attorney "exemplifying the highest professional standards and achievement in the field of criminal law during his distinguished career."

Announcing the award, the Daily Record Editorial Advisory Board lauded **Sodaro** for his "professionalism, civility and service that he exhibited in his long career of serving the public as a prosecutor and **judge**."

Sodaro is survived by his wife, Mildred Glass **Sodaro**; three daughters, Stephanie Esworthy, Susanne **Sodaro** and Christine **Sodaro**; and two grandchildren, Matthew and Suzanne Christine Esworthy.

A viewing will be held tomorrow at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church, Joppa Road and Bosley Avenue in Towson, at 9:30 a.m., followed by a Mass at 10:30 a.m.

Interment follows at Dulaney Valley Memorial Gardens.

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